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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004891

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SUBJECT: SCIRI LEADER WARNS OF ELECTION FRAUD, BENDS ON DE-BA'ATHIFICATION

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Over dinner with the Ambassador on November 29, SCIRI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim and Interior Minister Bayan Jabr alleged the U.S. excludes Iraqi security forces from operations against insurgents and also warned of election fraud. Hakim's aides noted that the constitutional requirement for a two-thirds majority vote on the next Presidency Council ensured that a broad coalition government will emerge. Hakim reluctantly agreed with the Ambassador that electoral candidates identified by the De-Ba'athification Commission should be able to review the evidence against them before being removed from the election slates. Hakim also agreed that provincial elections should be held several months after the December 15 national election. Hakim said he welcomes the USG decision to engage Iran at the level of the Ambassador solely on matters relating to Iraq's security, and he volunteered to pass messages to further the dialogue. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On November 29 at his residence, the Ambassador hosted SCIRI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, Interior Minister Bayan Jabr, and deputy SCIRI leader Humam al-Hammudi for dinner.

¶3. (C) SECURITY STRATEGY: Hakim expressed concern that Iraqis lack a clear leader they could rely on to improve security in Iraq. Too many officials making decisions confuses the matter, he said. The Ambassador and Minister Jabr both agreed that improving security in Baghdad would be key to stabilizing Iraq as a whole. Jabr complained that too often he and Defense Minister Sa'adounDulaimi meet and agree on policies only to see implementation fall through at a lower level.

¶4. (C) Jabr asserted that U.S. commanders also impede operations; as an example, he pointed to the deployment of a U.S. brigade to a heavily-populated area in Baghdad that should have included three times as many Iraqi forces -- but Iraqi advice was ignored, he said. Hakim added that U.S. military commanders blocked a planned Iraqi operation in Diyala. Jabr said he felt particularly hamstrung by allegations that he is a sectarian Shia leader, not an Iraqi one. (NOTE: He implied that this criticism came from both U.S. and Iraqi sides. END NOTE.) Such criticism has made him reluctant to dispatch his forces to Sunni areas, he said, particularly Ramadi. Jabr added that Election Day security is now his top priority.

¶5. (C) ELECTION FRAUD FEARS: Looking ahead to the elections, Hakim told the Ambassador that he is concerned that fraud will occur when IECI workers plug their count into a computer program used to tally the seats. He claimed that fraud of this nature cost the Shia Alliance some 20 seats in the January elections. (NOTE: We did not hear such an allegation last February. END NOTE.) UN SRSG Ashraf Qazi dropped in on the meeting and Hakim raised this concern directly with him, requesting a copy of the election software for review. Qazi pledged to look into the matter and to arrange a meeting with SCIRI officials to discuss election preparations in detail. Both Qazi and the Ambassador emphasized that the surest path to preventing fraud is sending monitors to polling centers. Hamudi said the Shia Alliance has plans to dispatch some 7,000 monitors on Election Day, some of whom have benefited from National Democratic Institute training. Qazi said the UN is requesting that the EU supply monitors for the vote. Qazi also lamented that the security situation represents a significant obstacle.

¶6. (C) SPECULATING ON THE NEXT GOVERNMENT: Despite entreaties from the Ambassador, Hakim declined to predict the shape of the next government or the election outcome. Hammudi noted that the constitutional requirement for a two-thirds vote on the next Presidency Council ensures that a broad coalition government will emerge. Hakim claimed that the Shia Alliance had been ready to include Ayad

Allawi and his coalition in the transitional government, but he said Allawi rejected their offers. Hakim claimed that Allawi insisted on the prime ministership, and, when he could not attain it, chose total opposition over cooperation. Jabr predicted Allawi would win only 15 seats in the coming election, with Chalabi winning 3-5.

17. (C) DIALOGUE WITH IRAN: Hakim welcomed the U.S. decision to engage Iran at the level of the Ambassador on matters relating to Iraq's security. Hakim volunteered to pass messages to further the dialogue. He urged the U.S. to continue pursuing a policy of pressuring Syria in order to achieve control over the western border.

18. (C) CAIRO IRAQI ACCORD CONFERENCE: Hakim said he considers the Cairo Conference a success that will hamper the insurgency's ability to de-legitimize the Iraqi government. Hammudi, who shook hands with Muslim Ulema Council leader Harith al-Dari during the conference, noted that Dari refused to acknowledge that Sunni and Shia share a religion. Hammudi said his subsequent meeting with Grand Imam of Al-Azhar al-Tantawi was much better. Hammudi defended the final statement from the Cairo Conference as a clear denunciation of all violence in Iraq. When showed the exact text and the implication that attacks on Coalition Forces could be justified, Hammudi made no attempt to rebut. Jabr agreed that this particular language had not been helpful.

19. (C) DE-BA'ATHIFICATION OF CANDIDATES: The Ambassador told Hakim that candidates accused of being Ba'athists should have the opportunity to review the evidence against them before being purged from the candidate lists. Hakim initially argued back. He said the De-Ba'athification Commission had the authority to make such judgments on its own. PolCouns observed that several of the 80 candidates thus far accused of being senior Ba'athists appeared to be innocent of the charge. PolCouns asked Hammudi how his own constitution committee deputy, Adnan al-Janabi, could be a Ba'athist. Hammudi expressed surprise that Janabi was on the list and claimed he was not. When the Ambassador confirmed that Adnan al-Janabi is on the De-Baathification Commission's list, Hammudi and Hakim acknowledged that a review of the evidence would be a fair step before any action is taken.

10. (C) PROVINCIAL ELECTION TIMING: The Ambassador suggested that the provincial elections be put off until several months after the national elections. The proposed date of February 15 included in some draft legislation, he said, is too early for proper security measures to be planned. Hakim agreed and said he considered conducting the provincial elections simultaneously with the referendum on constitutional amendments, which is scheduled for six months after the stand-up of the next National Assembly. Jabr also was supportive of moving the election date back. (NOTE: On December 4, the TNA passed an amended version of the provincial elections law, which sets the elections for "two months after the formation of the new government." END NOTE.)
KHALILZAD